Transient Images

Personal Media in Public Frameworks

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I have tried to unearth is a more subtle aspect of trauma that is buried beneath the more accessible and perhaps forceful tragedy—the loss of human life. For there is still an exposed wound in the new geography of Manhattan. The trauma here is the inability to return the landscape to its former state, an anxiety reflected even in the field of popular culture, where producers and critics consider how to treat now-obsolete images of the city's skyline.

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Trauma and the Cellular Imaginary

Philosophical concepts are fragmentary wholes that are not aligned with one another so that they fit together, because their edges do not match up. They are not pieces of a jigsaw puzzle but rather the outcome of throws of the dice. They resonate nonetheless, and the philosophy that creates them always introduces a powerful Whole that, while remaining open, is not fragmented.

GILLES DELEUZE AND FELIX GUATTARI, *WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?*

"Everywhere you go, there you are." *Motorola's vision of Seamless Mobility is to make your life all about you. It's about devices that share information so you don't have to remember where the file is. It's about intelligent networks that automatically know who you are and the information you need. It's about making your home more connected, your car more aware, your office more mobile and the world around you more personal, more predictive, and more accessible. By linking together every networked device in your life, Motorola wants to make it possible for you to find everyone and everything, everywhere you are.*

MOTOROLA 2004 ANALYSTS MEETING

At Motorola's 2004 Analysts Meeting at the Westin O'Hare Hotel in Rosemont, Illinois, the company celebrated two enterprises—making seamless mobility real and making liquid media real. The realness in both cases was marked by the materialization of concepts, their embodiment (taking on physical form) in several distinct software, hardware, and interface technologies. Reviewing the former of these two pronouncements, Motorola's press coverage claimed: "Seamless mobility—the interconnection of devices between operating systems, platforms, and media—was living and breathing at the Motorola 2004 Analysts meeting."[1]

Seamless mobility is, in part, about marking the terrain, making the general field a space for autobiographical work; our personal data trails bridge and brand physical locations. But in commercial discourses, autobiography is not a privileged term, even though it is trotted out as a powerful conceptual

hook in countless advertising campaigns. Instead, seamless mobility suggests that the consumer is continuously connected to relevant content across devices, networks, and physical environments; and in this series of exchanges, the personalization of protocols is the only trace of the end user's psyche. Autobiography is shaped into a very limited form of self-expression, registered in the myriad ways we engage with and control technology. But how enlightening are such exercises? While my interest is in the autobiographical work accomplished by mobile consumers, "work" may be an inappropriate term here, for it begs the question: "What type of work is actually being performed?"

Motorola's vision of user experience invokes a world where, according to the company's promotional literature, consumers are "mobile, informed, entertained, secured, connected and empowered."[2] Yet this laundry list of actions is displayed as self-evident, and reads as a series of empty slogans, each of which begs any number of inquisitive retorts: Secured against what? Empowered how, exactly? Certainly, Motorola's vision of empowerment does not parallel social movement rhetoric; instead, the company foregrounds the personalization and control of communicative acts. What is evoked is only the most obvious expression of productivity that is in step with the workaday logic of business—not business as usual, but more business than usual. In this chapter, my goal is to explore the terms of productivity more forcefully and to identify moments of activity that seem to be either off-limits or out-of-bounds in order to examine those spaces and actions that seem either unproductive or counterproductive. Empowerment is a forcefully agentive concept, yet it seems a rather passive construct in Motorola's hands, reduced to a matter of conceptualization rather than a call to action.

In the field of contemporary telecommunications, mobile producers and carriers are not simply corporations but acquaintances; we are hailed by such pleasantries as "Hello Moto" and asked to celebrate consumption, value, and technophilia, while being urged to "Get More." Moreover, cellular producers and providers, building on the planned obsolescence inherent to selling technology, call attention to the new and evolving interface with reality—perfecting verisimilitude and integration, measured in megapixels, transmission rates, and other data sets and coded through the familial iconography of their advertising campaigns. Yet in the same moment, the world is being more forcefully reimagined and pointedly reimaged; the relationship between vision and reality is not simply allegorical, especially as the individual and the family are being called into active service for the nation. The selective tethering of the two terms (vision and reality) has material consequences, and we must be attentive to who is constructing the reference frame. The media frame—whether a hardware device, a software interface, or a matter of content creation and management—can contour our imagining of the world beyond the window. We must consider who is reimaging the world and what collaborative partnerships (industrial, governmental, popular, or otherwise) are shaping our knowledge of the public realm of everyday events and actions.

iPhone and the Snuff Film

On December 30, 2006, Saddam Hussein was executed in Iraq after being sentenced to death by hanging for crimes against humanity. Just over one week later, on January 9, 2007, Steve Jobs was introduced on stage to the tune of James Brown's "I Feel Good" and proceeded to unveil the iPhone as part of his keynote address at Macworld in San Francisco. Although these men were on public display for very different purposes, and on quite different stages, they were inevitably bound together by certain cultural logics of new media.

By mid-January 2007, a two-and-a-half-minute clip of Saddam Hussein's execution had been viewed 15,605,630 times on Google Video and had received a rating of four out of five stars (ranking it "above average"). But this clip is just one of many cataloged by Google Video, each of which has a unique title. While most of the entries feature the same video, recorded by a witness to the execution using a cell phone, others take some liberties with the footage, including: a four-minute piece titled "Swinging Saddam Execution Video," described as a "groovy" video "starring GeGe the Go Go girl and her new dance the 'Saddam Swing'!"; and another, "Hanging Saddam," featuring a one-and-a-half-minute still-image montage, a chronology framed by traditional wipe, dissolve, and documentary effects (in the style of Ken Burns), shaped into essayistic form by intertitles, and underscored by Green Day's "Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)."[3]

At the end of June 2007, Apple released its iPhone to consumers in the United States and began to make its first inroads into the telecommunications business. Steve Jobs proudly points out that the company's latest device is not just a mobile phone but also a widescreen iPod and an Internet communicator. The iPhone is, of course, part of a larger industrial history of cellular technology and, like the developments that precede it, the result of a persistent engagement with an evolving and inherently ideologically charged visual interface. The architecture of the mobile phone platform is, after all, a language, and the latest "revolution" in user interfaces marks the degree to which hardware and software are conceptualized in tandem.

In his discussion of cultural transcoding, Lev Manovich suggests that the computer layer and the cultural layer push against and shape each other, to the extent that the general computerization of culture in the digital age gradually substitutes existing cultural categories and concepts with new ones that

derive from the computer's ontology.[4] Much in the same manner, geopolitics is bound to spatial politics and reveals the causal relationships between political power and geographic space; natural resources can shape social and political relations, and those very same relations are capable of pushing back against the physical terrain. On the subject of ontological remapping, the shrine city of Kazimain is now home to a Camp Justice franchise, one of several United States military bases in Iraq and one of many such installations across the globe. Law can reclaim fixed points on a compass once claimed by faith; and satellite images reveal the number of distinct institutional footprints that mark the land. Justice can be made elastic and modifiable (the structures at Guantanamo Bay can be ported and erected elsewhere); it can be architected to fit any set of legalistic circumstances, and it can literally remake the political landscape in its own image. Beyond allegory, justice has decided physical properties and consequences; it claims space and has malleable dimensions.

Similarly, computer hardware and software shape culture, and the ability to generate, organize, manipulate, and disseminate data—though part of the developmental trajectory of computer programming—has a much broader impact, influencing how we process the world around us. Computational space has become part of lived space (we live in an interface culture), and computing itself now privileges interaction over computation. However portable and personal, we should not lose sight of the social and political consequences of even the most intimate of new technologies.

A recent Apple press release suggests that the iPhone "completely redefines what you can do on a mobile phone." These pronouncements suggest that Apple has thought through what consumers should do with their mobile phones and has a few ideas about what consumers actually will do, but according to an on-demand delivery logic of production, this purposefully leaves open other possibilities.[5] While the appropriated execution video of Saddam Hussein at the gallows in Kazimain has been subjected to what seems the logic of Apple's already popular iLife suite (embodying the simple material practices of audio and video mixing made possible by consumer-grade desktop editing tools), certainly phone manufacturers do not envision their devices being witness to an execution, nor do consumer-focused software manufacturers dwell on the rhetorical tropes of multitrack editing.

Trauma and the Technobiographic Subject

Given the contested status of the objects I have just considered, this latest push in the pursuit of a digital lifestyle leads me to certain questions about the relationship between two forms of integration—one accomplished and

evidenced by technological convergence and the other associated with the domain of trauma therapy. The former is of a physical and mechanical nature and the latter is psychical and biological. What connects these two enterprises (of integration) is the common push toward embodiment, as well as their mutual dependence on media.[6] As part of a developmental trajectory, one of the aims of trauma therapy is to localize sensation, delimiting what was once excessive, and to reattach the subject; this is especially the approach in trauma theories based on dissociation, which emphasize the importance of retrieval, abreaction (the release of emotional tension, often by acting out), and integration on the path toward psychotherapeutic change. Likewise, the push toward a singular (and, coincidentally, Cingular, in the case of Apple's United States–locked cellular network provider) manifestation of the digital lifestyle can be read as a narrative about localizing sensation, investing in one device, and channeling distinct media along one conduit, though the change being actuated is a bit more oblique.[7] Is this a change in technology, character, or culture? As Jobs suggests, the interface itself is fluid and responsive, its malleability an assurance that the iPhone can adapt to changes in the media landscape and retain its centrality. The "buttons" themselves are virtual and can be remapped; the hardware of the iPhone is almost as fluid as the software. Apple's "Instead" campaign shapes the iPhone into a phantasmagorical digital hub, touting: "Here's an idea. Instead of carrying an iPod and a phone, why not carry an iPod, with all your favorite music and your favorite movies, *in* your phone." The iPhone is imbued with the phantom limbs of its predecessors. While its functionality may seem rather open, the device is not simply an empty vessel; it is shaped by our experiences with earlier media forms and it is launched within a prevailing cultural attitude.

The general trend toward seamless mobility heralded in the research and development of new technologies (the integration of multiple feature-rich media devices and operating platforms—in the home, in the car, and at the office) is part of a larger projection of the future of liquid media (taking media and shaping it to the various circumstances that people find themselves in) that also wants to embroil the subject in the technology.[8] New media industries are drafting biographical practices that subsequently can be attached to individual authors. The aim is to create new media frameworks that replicate subjectivity and merge the lived context with an apparatus of production, fostering the development of "technobiographies" that write the self through the postindustrial logic of new media.[9] Responsive technologies seem to situate end users as unique social actors, as inscribed data (though not governing code) accumulates and becomes symptomatic of our presence. New technologies may seem to operate freely to the extent that they act intuitively, but their intuition is by design; it is inherently the result of a script (of a coding

activity brought to fruition by developers). As we become conscious of the possibilities for remapping technology, do we overlook the limits of our own subjectivity, itself the product of an unseen script?

The technobiographic subject is constructed through multiple frameworks. It may be useful, as a start, to outline the following actions that I believe are central to the life technobiographic: (1) anthropomorphizing technology, (2) humanizing technology, (3) fostering dependencies with responsive technologies, (4) using autobiography as a signature content referent, and (5) helping individuals put autobiography into practice. These actions are given form within a number of institutional spaces, narrated by each institution's respective discourse. We see them given form in advertising, industry, and education; they are militarized and often politicized. We see the technobiographic subject celebrated and demonized. In the most general sense, the technobiographic subject may be approximated by examining its encounters with technology; in essence, it is written through them, and recorded and shaped by them. We see this in the life of smart objects that record our personal preferences, as well as in the contouring of smart objects whose interfaces and intelligences have been carefully calibrated with the human subject in mind, making such technologies seem intuitive and responsive. And we see this in the type of fluidity we expect in our engagements with new technologies, a feature we begin to demand rather habitually in our daily lives, regardless of the context.

While I am critical of blind media effects discourse (hypodermic needle theories have been repeatedly upended), I turn to a number of ad campaigns to illustrate how technology is regularly positioned as a technobiographic agent. Most prominent, we see technology consistently anthropomorphized and humanized throughout Apple's multigenerational advertising legacy, beginning with its "1984" ad, a tale of human resistance in a PC-laden Orwellian society. Following through with this impulse several decades later (perhaps as a lighthearted reprisal of the troubling man/machine dyad), a 2002 spot for Apple's redesigned iMac (a flat-screen monitor mounted to a semispherical CPU by a swivel arm) features a man standing outside a store window as he is taunted by an iMac that mimics his every movement. And anthropomorphism segues into humanism in Apple's more recent "Get a Mac" campaign. Opening with the now-familiar greeting, "Hello, I'm a Mac," the spots (created by Apple's advertising mainstay TBWA\Chiat\Day) use actors to play the competing architectures of Mac and PC. Pushing beyond the two platforms, the campaign's later spots expand the human chain. "Network" is designed to highlight Mac's compatibility and casts a Japanese woman as the embodiment of a digital camera. In an effort to familiarize and demystify, and to insert technology into active citizenship (computers are now part of the general population, though clearly cleansed of any dystopic cyborg resi-

Anthropomorphism emerges in a 2002 Apple iMac advertisement.

due), these ads efface technology altogether—they cast it only as a series of human equivalences.

We see autobiography used as a signature content referent across a range of devices. Apple's "Elope" spot, an advertisement for iDVD, features a Mac-savvy groom who surprises his folks with a DVD of his South Pacific wedding, assembled using iDVD. And the company's "Middle Seat" spot, an ode to Apple's "Think Different" slogan, highlights the rather resourceful actions of a college-age male as he turns his airline seat into an in-flight editing studio and begins to string together clips of his girlfriend and her dog using his iBook and iMovie. In "Elope" and "Middle Seat" (both of which were broadcast in 2001), technology is embedded in a familiar and familial economy that traverses personal geographies and merges different lived contexts (honeymoon and home movie are digitized, migrated, manipulated, and exhibited). Specific places are represented and compressed; events are rescreened at some distance from their points of origin, yet the process is an obvious one. As these advertisements are primarily about a product interface, the act of viewing, scrutinizing, and organizing life's activities is privileged and simplified, even as the private realm is opened up to scrutiny by others (most explicitly in "Middle Seat," as the young man edits while surrounded by his cabinmates). These spots are an invitation to look; we are meant to see both the artifact and the process of manipulation. The goal is to demystify, to couch "ease" and convergence itself in a comfortable metaphor. Commenting on Apple's marketing campaign, advertising analyst Bob Garfield notes: "The 1984 ads did not do one single thing to illustrate or demonstrate the technology. These commercials dramatize in a very engaging way specific features. This is about function and killer apps."[10] Beyond a metaphoric imagining, both "Elope" and "Middle Seat" showcase the interface with noteworthy shots of the desktop screen and the application window, and they willfully explore the production

The iBook is positioned inside a familial economy in a 2001 Apple advertisement.

T-Mobile courts consumers in a 2002 advertisement that embeds private family photos in a public urban landscape.

process to forcefully demonstrate the practical ways that technology can be integrated into everyday life. They move from using autobiography as an empty reference (an advertising trope that simply tugs at our heartstrings) to demonstrating how it might be put into practice.

Following suit, mobile carriers have promoted their own scenarios of integration, literally mobilizing the technobiographic subject. In the 2002 T-Mobile "Baby" advertisement, as people go about their daily routines, a picture of a smiling baby girl starts appearing in the public landscape, embedded in a variety of widely distributed and readily visible media forms (e.g., billboards, bus benches, newspapers, T-shirts, and shopping bags). In these varied contexts, the image functions as news and advertisement, as it follows several commercial flows while maintaining its privatized (though ritualized) function as an image aligned with the family photo album. For T-Mobile, the image announces the birth of a new network of possibilities—a technology in its infancy, though hardly infantilized. Promoting mobile-to-mobile picture messaging, the ad's announcer suggests: "When something great happens, you want everyone to see it. . . . Life's better with pictures."

Likewise, Nokia (in the business of "connecting people") has adopted a campaign that positions its phones as a bridge between "vision" and "reality." The company prompts users to reimagine their worlds, a cultural reimagining made possible only through technology. A 2006 ad campaign for the Nokia N91 features five vignettes. In each, the technology infects its host. The audio tracks from the MP3-capable device play back across each user's body (with each host caught in some act of desiring—dancing, looking, listening, kissing, touching); acoustics become a physical script, a transitory and fluid tattoo that draws itself across each person's skin and gives form to their desire. Nokia gives us an amusing and rather poetic metaphor for embodiment, set to the up-tempo longings of Moby's "In My Heart."
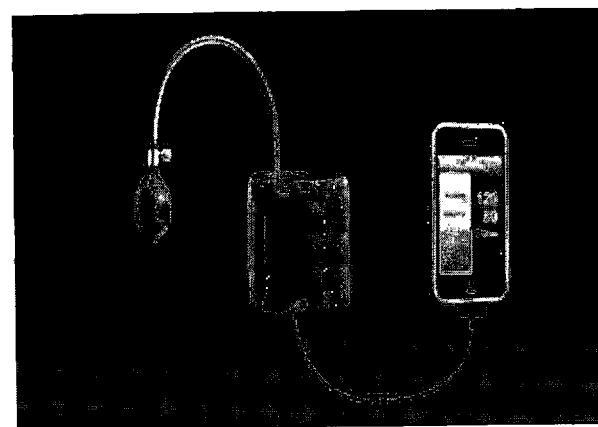
The T-Mobile and Nokia campaigns push technobiographic agency to its logical end; they point to the viral nature of new technologies, but understand the viral as a virile evolutionary enhancement. The technology infiltrates, marking the physical terrain, but what it leaves in its wake is a trail of subject-bound signifiers pronouncing humanity. Or the technology invades, merging with the subject, but it does not efface the subject's presence; rather, it promotes new forms of expressivity, fostering the creative impulse and fueling the desiring engine. At times, technology provides new feedback loops; it reveals our state of being. Here, technological determinism gives way to biomechanical determinism. When Apple unveiled details about its iPhone 3.0 software in March 2009, the company also announced a new class of third-party peripheral development: iPhone-compliant medical devices (a blood pressure cuff and a Johnson & Johnson LifeScan blood glucose meter). These accessories and their respective application suites enable the recording, charting, and transmission of physiological data, connecting patients to their bodies and to their health-care providers. The iPhone is positioned as a fundamental aspect of well-being. Throughout its brief history, the iPhone has been repeatedly framed as a biofeedback device. Continuing a partnership launched by Nike and Apple in 2006, the newest phones can be paired with the Nike+, a wireless in-shoe accelerometer that records the runner's workout statistics. The position of the iPhone as both a popular communicative tool and a personal technobiographic agent is not unique. Microsoft Research introduced the SenseCam in 1999, a wearable digital camera designed to take photos passively, without user intervention. The device has been used in clinical trials for the treatment of patients with a broad range of memory disorders, as a tool to complement the restoration of autobiographical memory. Several SenseCam studies have highlighted the relative importance of images to the distinct memory processes of knowing (an act of pure inference) and remembering
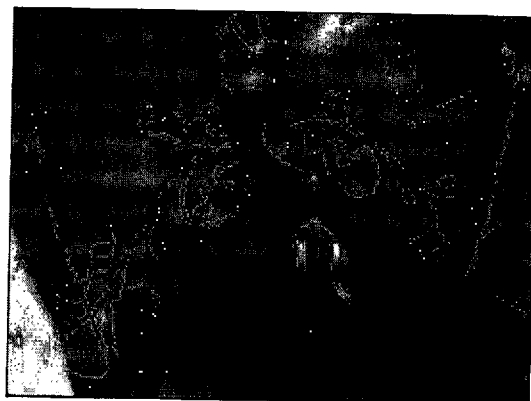
In a 2006 advertisement for the Nokia N91, technology draws itself across its host, becoming a physical script.

A concept design for an iPhone-compliant blood pressure cuff is one of several third party devices featured at a March 2009 Apple development event. (http://www. apple.com/quicktime/ qtv/preview-iphone-os, accessed January 29, 2010; site now discontinued)

(the production of mental re-experience). Like the iPhone, the SenseCam is part of a larger history of the evolution of an apparatus, in this case, of the varied technological practices associated with life-logging (the use of wearable technologies to create person digital archives). These practices bridge the work carried out in research laboratories with the popular deployment of parallel technologies in the commercial sector, and they bridge multiple media forms and object lessons (from the SenseCam and its images, to the Nike+ Sensor and its personal running metrics). These practices reveal the evolving contours of technobiography; they speak to the degree to which the body is a network, experience can be quantified, and life can be lived through data. Yet because of their diversity, these applications also foster a greater understanding of the nature of autobiographical knowledge, and the relative utility of autobiographical exchange. To log is not to blog, though the imperatives to record lived experience are often matched by the imperatives to make the personal data trail public and to connect with others. In this scenario, the community (of other bodies) functions as a yardstick for our wellness, and the online social network becomes part of a corporate supertext that extends the life of material goods. By touting the healthy rewards of its proprietary online social network, Nike, for example, encourages its consumers to share their otherwise personal data networks, and broadens the reach of its sensors.

These various advertising campaigns and research trajectories are signs of the general way that autobiography is being renegotiated in the digital age. Of course, contemporary practices are not simply birthed by industry, nor are they inherently driven by the technology; they are negotiated in the cultural field. For the camera holder, the transient image works as an explicit tool for autobiographical discourse; the mobile producer takes photos as his or her very life unfolds.[11] Yet there is also another strand of autobiographical dis-

course, a form of secondary revision that is nonetheless autobiographical on very similar grounds (of embroiling the subject in history), yet temporally and spatially distinct (and temporally and spatially open-ended in terms of the possible relation) from the moment and place of its capture. There are at least two primary autobiographical tales: the mobile phone user taking the snapshot while perambulating, and the reader accessing the trail of the photographer. In the context of new media, connected technologies infuse both producer and reader (as in the digital camera's trace in the online social network or the protocols of short message services). The general shift from autobiography to technobiography is a shift in emphasis, and I use the latter term to consider the role that technology plays in both the expression and construction of self. At the same time, I use the term technobiography as a reminder that the interaction between self and technology imbues the technology with a residual trace of the subject; this trace is a lingering trail of subjectivity. It may be found in either a device or in cyberspace; it is a string of signifiers that are forever lodged in the network, in hardware, or in application space, even after the subject departs.

To complicate such apparent seamlessness between self and technology, and in the general birth of the technobiographic subject, I want to examine one potential point of interruption. How might trauma halt the autobiographic project and alter the technobiographic subject? This question is called out with the greatest force in the case of national trauma (rather than personal trauma), when the individual's engagement with technology is reconstituted as something larger than the individual. The lingering trail of subjectivity becomes more diffuse as it is called into service for the nation, and its immediate attachments are purposefully erased or forever lost beneath the chatter. Dispersion seems antithetical to personal synthesis, and

indeed it is, but it seems a fundamental part of contouring the nation; diffusion allows the abstraction of national identity to come into being. What I am pointing out are the difficulties and dangers of speaking about a collective consciousness, though such collectivities are constantly proposed by a variety of authorizing institutions—states, churches, and the like. In a new media landscape littered with nonsequiturs, how do we ever see the collective? Isn't the narrative repeatedly derailed by the ceaseless introduction of new points of view?

Referencing Sigmund Freud's work on the formation of subjectivity, E. Ann Kaplan pointedly reminds us that "how one relates to a traumatic event depends on one's individual psychic history, on memories inevitably mixed with fantasies of prior catastrophes, and on the particular cultural and political context within which a catastrophe takes place, especially how it is 'managed' by institutional forces."[12] Trauma opens us up to the willful pursuit of a particular (cohesive) subject position. Not surprisingly, an industry has emerged to fill the drives of this recognizable state of transience and, ultimately, being.[13] In part, by speaking about trauma, I aim to speak about the business of desire and its relative freedom as a commodity. As I have already illustrated, the tenets of the life technobiographic have become principles for aggressive entrepreneurship.

The Event: Convergence, Integration, and Flow

An August 2006 *CNN.com* article on the Israel-Lebanon conflict featured an image, recorded on a cell phone, of a building struck by a Hezbollah rocket.[14] And one year earlier, the *Washington Post* ran an article featuring cell phone images shot by people in the aftermath of the London terrorist attacks, highlighting pictures of transit passengers caught in a tunnel near King's Cross Station.[15] Framed by the popular news media as a form of citizen journalism, from a more immediate vantage point, these sites of imaging shared both locally and across the blogosphere create a fabric of intimate communication that allows photographer and viewer to shape the lexicon of terror.

If the cellular imaginary is in part the product of venture capital, what are the stakes for any photographic act that is not simply a recording, but potentially a working through? Or is working through even possible when diachronic continuity meets an assumed zenith in seamless mobility? These questions are clearly engaged with the role of the individual in convergence culture, where experience is framed not simply by more obvious and centralized media formations (such as commercial broadcasting and its catalog of images and narratives) but also by a host of desired technologies, personal and portable. These technologies, however intimate, are still industrial fabrications. Dissemination is not simply about sending out messages but also

about distributing devices. Similarly, a narrative is not simply a self-contained news story but also a protocol for using any given technology (for thinking about its use-value).

Ironically, the battle cry to decentralize the media seems less urgent now that many of us have the necessary tools to communicate. We have gained the freedom to take our own images and forge our own communiqués. With this apparent openness in mind, my goal here is to examine the relative freedom and utility of our exchanges by looking more closely at one of our dominant tool sets—the mobile phone—and consider whether more communication means better communication. To this end, I focus on one particular artifact—the documentation of traumatic events—and, more purposefully, I review a number of incidents that have moved beyond any singular personal register to become signposts of the nation. By reading trauma that has been cellularly transposed, my aim is to study the role of technology at two distinct pressure points—where the individual meets the nation, and where industry meets culture.

Far from simply communicating, sending images across the Internet, the cell phone user at ground zero is both witnessing and translating trauma. As trauma, in critical discourse, has been inherently linked to modernity and its dissociating effects, we must consider the conflicted role of the citizen journalist who is creating cultural memories within the framework of being a traumatized subject. Documenting and transmitting from the field, the citizen journalist is trapped between the spheres of the private and the public. More concretely, the journalistic record may bridge these spheres and be filtered through a number of distinct commercial streams (passed through the cellular network, streamed to the Internet, embedded in a social networking site, or traded and indexed by network news agencies).[16] The moment seems to be a media bonanza; it is an opportune occasion to emote and analyze (or in practical terms, to participate and watch). But this individual also occupies a split-subject position; as analyst and analysand, this field reporter seems to be forever closing off the possibility of secondary revision. Is posttraumatic integration even conceivable when images of terror never serve as meditative points divorced from an original act or as screen memories, but instead as visible, contemporaneous evidence? As the temporal gap between production and distribution is closed, so too is the lag between occurring and witnessing. In the face of immediacy, the role of memory (the ability to recall) is becoming more tenuous, even as the proliferation of visible evidence never lets us forget. Any event seems perpetually lodged in some database, readily retrieved as a subset in a catalog of Google images. I want to draw out what I believe is a subtle but important distinction between remembering (memory in action) and not forgetting (a residue of memory in action). The former seems to call

on the individual, while the latter seems to be more firmly ensconced in cultural sanctions that privilege certain events as forever memorable (ascribing a collective value to them).

In the examples scattered throughout this chapter, I have already moved from the gallows to the London underground. However, I am not suggesting that an execution and a bombing are parallel traumatic events. An execution itself is not necessarily a site of public trauma, and the clandestine recording of an execution is not necessarily a journalistic act (though the act has subsequently become part of journalistic discourse). Yet once imaged, the artifact or record itself may become its own site of trauma—this seems to be decidedly the case with the execution, where the act of producing and distributing (of recording and circulating) has created its own cultural rift. And as phones become rich HTML (HyperText Markup Language) Web browsers, no longer are images simply circulated as free-floating artifacts, but rather they are positioned alongside parallel or divergent discursive threads that exist simultaneously on Google Video, YouTube, or other database interfaces. In these frameworks, meaning is anchored by a series of preordained social bookmarks that seem to alter the type of working through that is possible. Saddam Hussein and the Go Go Girl are bound together, and an execution is situated concentrically with the iTunes store.

As the narrator of Apple's 2007 "Instead" campaign concludes his sales pitch, an incoming call presses against the horizontal frame of a Hollywood blockbuster movie playing on the phone's screen. Footage shot and sent from any ground zero might similarly intrude; the recipient might get the urgent call and its attachment while watching or listening to other media. The footage would be immediately inserted into a divergent contextual media flow that is birthed not from the producer's personal experience but from other cultural products. While convergence has been positioned as liberating, media integration may randomly generate cultural discord. What may be produced is an extremely unstable supertext.[17] As the journalistic field expands to include bloggers and cell phone videographers, the new catalog of images produced by these groups poses a conceptual challenge to ethics codes and general notions of newsworthiness. And, at a purely logistical level, as these images stream into already rich media conduits, they can produce semantic chaos.[18] Conversations intersect and media pathways do not simply converge but pass through each other, breaking each other's flow only temporarily. One dialogue yields to another. The music is paused until the talking is over; the film frame is frozen or the image is put away until time permits further viewing. Structural analysis itself becomes an impossible affair, as whole new grammatical systems are invented. Yet despite this complication, the flow is still decipherable and the messages remain meaningful.

Drawing on the work of John Berger, Edward Soja asserts that space is returning with a vengeance in contemporary life, fundamentally changing our modes of narration and forcing us to engage with the prospect of simultaneity:

> We can no longer depend on a story-line unfolding sequentially, an ever-accumulating history marching straight forward in plot and denouement, for too much is happening against the grain of time, too much is continually traversing the story-line laterally. . . . Simultaneities intervene, extending our point of view outward in an infinite number of lines, connecting the subject to a whole world of comparable instances, complicating the temporal flow of meaning, short-circuiting the fabulous stringing-out of "one damned thing after another."[19]

To become more active and engaged with the communicative process, we need to pay closer attention to movement, to migration. What happens as any enunciation traverses space? The haunting underground pictures taken by transit passenger Alexander Chadwick just moments after the July 7, 2005, bombing at King's Cross Station did not simply circulate through the commercial news circuit; they also appeared on the public photo-sharing site Flickr, where they were variably tagged and copied into personal photo albums and became part of the site's larger rubric, finding a home in the "London Bomb Blasts Community" group.[20] Within the group, the images were woven into a broad tapestry, inserted into a composite of terrorism throughout the city, narrated through multiple perspectives, registered as part of a national memorial, and though grouped together in an album, easily redeployed as geographic markers using Flickr's virtual mapping.[21] As part of both traditionally centralized broadcast fare and the more open conduit of Flickr, Chadwick's photos became readily lodged in a narrative web that seems perhaps an all-too-satisfying portrait revealed in ever-increasing detail as it moves us toward meaningful wholeness. We experience this not only in the manner that images are framed (becoming part of a singular narrative trajectory) by broadcast media but also in the manner that publicly malleable image-sharing sites, as openly collaborative endeavors, readily invoke their readers. When hosted on Flickr, each image accumulates a trail of comments and tags that speak to and about an audience. The comments form a temporal trail of annotations, a chronology that moves further and further away from the date of the original post and tends to meander, much like an old-fashioned game of telephone, into tangential terrain; oftentimes, the conversational thread leaves the original object behind to speak to the trail of posts as an object in and of itself. And the tags, part of a new folksonomic logic that is beginning to govern the Web, form an integral part of a

The London Bomb Blasts Community on Flickr houses an archive of images and comments that document and reflect on the events of July 2005. (http://www.flickr .com/groups/bomb/pool)

bottom-up taxonomy, a user-friendly indexing system intended to make the Web more responsive to end user preferences.[22] Despite any initial urgency or call to action, the transiency of images and texts is concealed by the simultaneous display of their accumulated tags and trails. The images become a meaningful text in their own right; what is evidenced here is not a trail of social actors but rather a quantity of blissfully active readers. This leads me to two related questions. What is revealed in this set of signs and what has escaped transcription?
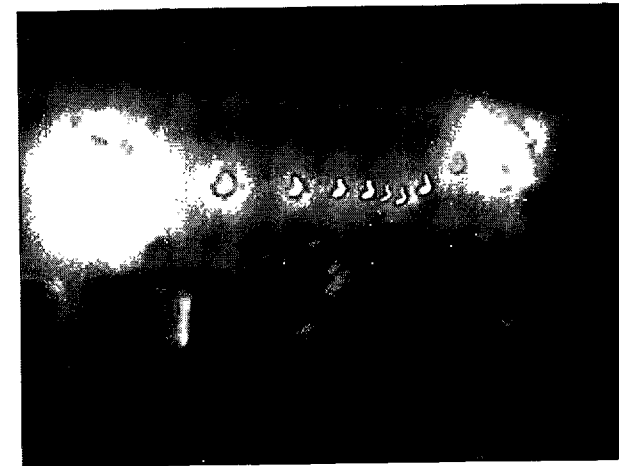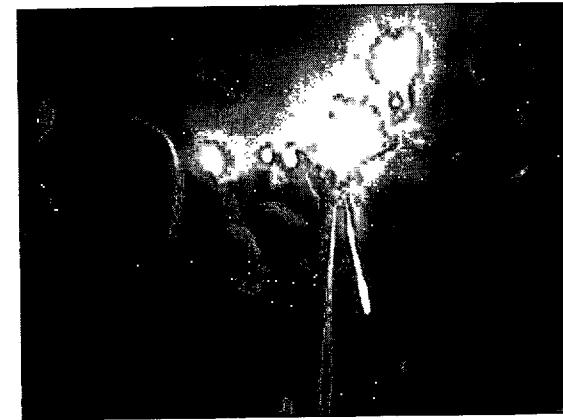
The King's Cross Station Underground is captured via cell phone camera immediately following the July 7, 2005 bombing. (Photos by Alexander Chadwick, copyright AP/Wide World Photos)

Media Flow and Trauma

E. Ann Kaplan reminds us that an important element in the consideration of trauma is an understanding of one's specific position vis-à-vis an event; in her discussion of trauma, she relates the importance of distinguishing different positions and contexts of encounters with trauma. To this end, we must insert not just notions of biological or kindred attachment (how far genetically we may be removed from those suffering or what form of familial or communal relation we have with those subjects under duress) but also other degrees of directness and indirectness, of which temporal, spatial, and other mappable psychic geographies are a part. And as many of us encounter trauma through the media—or at least encounter many more sites of trauma than we would otherwise be privileged to experience because of a media presence—we also must consider not simply how we

access trauma or are exposed to trauma but also its unique aspects as both a real and mediatized phenomenon that may alter the genetics of the event.

Vicarious trauma, as Kaplan suggests, is simply a response, temporally and spatially at least one step removed from the experience of trauma itself. It may be mediated through either centralized modes of production and distribution, or it may migrate through the margins; in either case, it is belatedly induced by some form of exposure (often through images). One of the strongest examples of vicarious trauma appears in Susan Sontag's *On Photography,* in a passage where she considers the quality of feeling evoked by still photos. How does one channel moral outrage at a point where only reflection is possible?

> One's first encounter with the photographic inventory of ultimate horror is a kind of revelation: a negative epiphany. For me, it was photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau which I came across by chance in a bookstore in Santa Monica in July 1945. Nothing I have seen—in photographs or real life—ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, though it was several years before I understood fully what they were about. What good was served by seeing them? They were only photographs—of an event I had scarcely heard of and could do nothing to affect, of suffering I could hardly imagine and could do nothing to relieve.[23]

What interests me about this story is not simply Sontag's revelation about the power of photographs, but also her very narrative. She recalls a chance encounter in a bookstore, which suggests that just moments before she had been engaged in another act—perhaps meandering, browsing, or reading. Within this chronology, the act of viewing can be understood as an interruption, to the extent that it constructed an abrupt divide in her conscience—an interruption she acknowledges in the abstract (one that bisected her life). But it also constructed a more overt divide in her actions. The narrative has both emotive and physical aspects, which is not surprising, as time, especially in its relation to trauma, is an embodied phenomenon. Yet the contradictory sense of time is also experienced, for an essential dimension of psychological trauma is the breaking up of the unifying thread of temporality; thus, one of the clinical features of trauma is described as dissociation, the effect of being ripped out of time. In lieu of the physical experience of time, space takes on a temporal and affective dimension triggered through an optical relay (in Sontag's case, the act of looking at the photographs)—space substitutes for the body, especially in the process of recalling the moment of trauma (the bookstore is an important aspect of Sontag's experience).

Earlier in her essay, Sontag oversimplifies the concept of flow, as she momentarily turns her attention to another medium: "Photographs may be more memorable than moving images, because they are a neat slice of time, not a flow. Television is a stream of underselected images, each of which cancels its predecessor."[24] While television may have a less-meaningful affective dimension because of its randomness, what I would suggest is that the experience of images of trauma inside televisual flow is less meaningful not because of any negation, but simply because it interrupts other culturally determined signifiers rather than one's own travels. My consideration of trauma is grounded in the terrain of new media where, as Manovich notes, we may encounter a logic of "addition and coexistence."[25] To this end, the concept of cancellation does not seem useful, especially in nonbroadcast data streams, which may be wide and occasionally random but are certainly not an underselected aggregate; deliberation and choice must be considered as fundamental elements in the push and pull of production and reception (especially in a new media landscape, where we are just as likely to contribute to flow as we are to be its recipients).

I also feel it is necessary to complicate Kaplan's own analysis of trauma. She parcels the general field of vicarious trauma into five subfields by offering a series of distinctions structured around the relative perception of an event. Of the five subfields, three merit some revision:

1. Direct experience of trauma (trauma victim)
2. Direct observations of another's trauma (bystander, one step removed)
3. Visually mediated trauma (i.e., moviegoer, viewing trauma on film or other media, two steps removed)[26]

What is the status of the trauma victim who simultaneously witnesses and mediates, making and distributing media while becoming a traumatized subject? And what does it mean to be a bystander, receiving media that relays the traumatized subject's optical point of view? New media frameworks call into question the very nature of visually mediated trauma, a term that otherwise seems to collapse distinctions between media forms, each of which may have different temporalities (some are more proximate to instantaneity), different spatialities (not all screen spaces are equal), different contextual fields (not all flows are the same), and varied degrees of narrative closure (not all texts are complete; some are simply fragments).

At the extreme dissociated end of vicarious trauma, Kaplan situates "empty" empathy, "elicited by images of suffering provided without any context or background knowledge."[27] Yet in new media spaces, context is hard to

avoid. Consider a July 2006 clip on YouTube—a fifty-second, low-resolution video recording of several Israeli bombs exploding in Beirut; the brief video is accompanied by the author's explanatory text:

> Listen to the horrifying blasts of Israeli bombs exploding in the Lebanese capital, Beirut. This video brings back haunting memories from the '82 Israeli invasion of Beirut. I was then only 4 years old, but the lasting impact of these blasts has never left me. For those lucky enough to have not experienced a war during their lifetime, it may appear to you that you understand all about it by watching CNN, BBC, or reading the papers. This video is an attempt to give you a more realistic sense of how terrifying a war can be on innocent civilians . . . and kids, just like me, 24 years ago![28]

The author's narrative is followed by a trail of comments and responses, part of YouTube's open architecture—comments that not only respond to the author and the source footage but also drift in other directions as secondary commentators begin to speak back to one another. What begins as a more universalizing appraisal of the horrors of war becomes a tale of two sides in the chorus of responses that follows; and what reads as an intimate and purposeful narrative of retrieval (remembering the 1982 bombings of Beirut, experienced as a child) and abreaction (acting out in the current moment through recording, listening, and writing—or more generally, through exposition) becomes a sign in and of itself. Responding to the initial entry, a June 2008 post reads: "Haha damn straight and plenty more where that came from. You motherfuckers stay on your side of the borders and we won't blow your sorry asses to pieces."[29] Integration is a personal affair, and psychohistory is a tale of individual progressions; so the narrative begins to unravel when it becomes part of a national symbolic. People experience and recover from trauma; nations (as constructs) do not. It is not surprising that personal narratives become less cohesive when they are asked to stand in as expressions of collectivity; to do so, they must be reopened, reexamined, and rewritten. The testimonial becomes a decidedly multivocal affair, subjected to the logic of hypertext and hypermedia. A one-page post becomes a multiple-paged trail of indictments that centers any number of subjects—Israelis, Lebanese, Arabs, Muslims—and engages in both national and personal agenda setting.

The space of new media seems to obfuscate an already-eroding boundary between individual and cultural trauma. By its very nature (as a dynamic text), the networked landscape continuously reframes personal experience and provides its own commodified contextual markers. Beyond the machinations of overt dialogue (such as the inventoried comment cited above), folk-

sonomic tags (descriptive keywords) attach the video and its commentaries to a user-generated list of associations, in this case, "Lebanon, Beirut, Israel, bombs, war, explosion, aggression, Hezbollah, civilians, death." Folksonomies cut across the personal and the social, borrowing and benefiting from both realms. They suggest a potentially democratic inroad into privatized site management, allowing end users to insert missing terms into a site's taxonomic infrastructure. But at the same time, they reflect the work of more broadly held cultural vocabularies, for tags place rather arbitrary limits on meaning; moving images become knowable as text-based systems. A video becomes attached to a series of terms and visual culture must be rigorously categorized if the search engine is to function.

To this end, as trauma is dispersed across new communications channels, we must come to understand the complexity of catastrophe as it registers through multiple positions, not all of which are purely spectatorial or separate from one another. We may at one time or another find ourselves at ground zero, and see our representation (ourselves) translated and watch our experience migrate, or we may only experience vicarious trauma, which may seem less privileged but which merits consideration because it provides an entry point for assessing the work of the apparatus (of distribution and exhibition, for example). Even vicarious experience is not a uniform phenomenon. Our understanding of an event is affected by how we access it, and not all media pathways are created equal. Any data set may be conformed to more than one interface. And the interface, more than simply the product of script and code, is perhaps the most immediate form of context setting.

Mediation is a complex phenomenon in the field of trauma, for media artifacts may occupy more than one position relative to traumatic experience. Developmentally, traumatic affect states are understood in terms of the relational systems in which they take form that play a significant role in tolerance, containment, and modulation. Understood as just such a system, certain media forms may be a critical component of posttraumatic integration. In Chapter 2, I briefly reference three modalities that are used to conceive trauma in the psychoanalytic model: remembrance, repetition, and working through. Interpreting Freud's comments on the connection between past and present, a temporal flux that is critical in psychoanalytic theories of trauma, Linda Belau relates: "The trauma pertaining to an event is less an inherent aspect of the event itself than it is an effect pertaining to the impossibility of integrating the event into a knowledgeable network."[30] The fluctuation is not simply temporal; it is also about a movement between the two poles of knowledge and being. Repetition implies a certain impossibility of integrating trauma into remembrance, while working through as a final and more overreaching view

of the process forces us to see the impossibility of integrating trauma at all; we are asked to understand and accept its very nature.[31]

Representations play a significant role in understanding trauma, calling out the very nature of an event as traumatic; on reflection, we see that an image is not able to carry the full weight of an episode or to suture over our psychical wounds. The online cellular archive, one facet of the readily searched database of recent and past events on YouTube, suggests a movement toward integration, but is perhaps only a simulacrum (a distortion of a real process—in this case, of synthesis—that nonetheless stands in as a truth in its own right, despite its questionable authenticity). The flow of responsive comments and essayistic video clips on YouTube gives evidence of working through, but these are just signs of a process and not a measure of any subject's progress toward embodiment or grounding a state of knowing. The fact that these pieces of visible evidence are embedded in a literal network (of things, of other objects) and easily embedded in other contextual frames (in the case of YouTube, a repurposing made possible through Adobe Flash) simply suggests a readier deployment. But what is signified in the ready and rapid circulation of particular artifacts? How do we make sense of a clip's popularity? What meaning should be ascribed to a number of views? We may have an active register of the number of times an object is consumed, but as with any media text, we have very limited knowledge that suggests to what end. The processes of cutting and pasting, embedding and hyperlinking, shooting, dialing, and sending, suggest synthesis at the level of hardware and software—at the interface. But the more important sign of synthesis, of a reembodied subject position, cannot be found online or in a device.

I suggest earlier in this chapter that simultaneity may interfere with post-traumatic integration, collapsing past and present. Images of lived experience may circulate at a speed that naturalizes the screen and may therefore press into our lives quite dramatically. Yet images that may at first spread like wildfire will ultimately find their place in the database, and their transitory nature will shift. An assumed collective experience (at first simply anecdotal) is ultimately given material form, and collectivity itself is made manifest—once thought, now seen, as discussions are mapped out in the Internet of Things. Lodged in the archive, still frames, motion replays, and edited (and editorialized) versions of traumatic events seem firmly integrated. Yet as history literally repeats itself, thanks to the playback controls of the media player or the more generalized openness of the Semantic Web, we become aware of a certain instability—our memories evolve as the narrative continues to be publicly written or as the event's trace simply moves to another domain. In fact, the neurological literature on representation and memory suggests that "representations are best described as emergent phenomena that undergo constant

change as processing continues."[32] Online archives serve us well if we do not use them as simple points of investment; instead, we should allow them to open us up to the possibility that traumatic events, by their very definition, cannot be contained by a URL (Uniform Resource Locator). The evolution of the online narrative within the field of trauma might be read as an objective trace of the operation of self.

Survival Tactics

A tagline, stated in the form of a question, from a 2005 *USA Today* column still calls out to me: "In the age of digital and 'delete' are we losing something?"[33] The article cites a statistic from a survey by the International Data Corporation that suggests 23 percent of all images captured by digital cameras are deleted, never getting exported. Social theorist Erving Goffman suggests that individual performance, as a simultaneous presentation both inward and outward, is used to construct identity. In this vein, we might also position a particular performative mode—the photographic act—as an act that includes both taking the photo and circulating it. Despite any apparent and unmitigated excesses of self-expression online, these acts are clearly a controlled working through that reflects a sophisticated understanding of the nature of the medium and its audience. The difficulty we encounter is when particular social fronts get institutionalized and become representations of collective expression. Social behavior in public places is controllable; we have only to look at urban design to understand the relative openness of online space. In the late 1960s, William Whyte launched a multiyear study to observe pedestrian behavior in public settings. As part of the grant-funded Street Life Project, Whyte set up a series of time-lapse cameras that enabled him to describe the substance of urban life in an objective way, and with considerable detail. In his published findings, Whyte suggests: "A good new space builds a new constituency. It stimulates people into new habits—al fresco lunches—and provides new paths to and from work, new places to pause. It does all this very quickly."[34]

As we send our images into public spaces, following YouTube's imperative to "broadcast ourselves," the consciousness that we bring to praxis needs to inform our postpraxis tactics.[35] To put it more simply, now that we have been invited to participate, we might think twice about our actions. We need to consider the unique dimensions of any public forum, as well as the trail of outcomes that will most likely follow our otherwise spatially and temporally bound acts of recording. My goal here has been to call out a series of questions concerning media mobility—about losing control, the allure of technology, and the latent intersections between democracy and technocracy—where social movement rhetoric meets social network rhetoric, and where public

welfare is determined by the sum total of our signs on the network. Trauma is a powerful phenomenon that often precludes deliberation and hesitation. Despite the desire to heal, or despite the positive push of the therapeutic impulse, we might pause for a moment to explore rupture itself as a powerful force, a space in which the promise of convergence goes unrealized if only because discourse of any kind seems insufficient. Why do we willfully seal over certain cracks and fissures with an outpouring of words and images? Before we begin to document and narrate, let us pause to explore those moments where speech truly fails us.

4

Intervention and the Kodak Moment

Any discussion of private-to-public media flows inevitably turns to the subject of reality television, a format that promises privileged access to the real. The attention to authenticity is matched by the impulse to mobilize conflict and dramatic development, contouring lived experience to the formal rules of broadcast television. We can see reality television as an industrial projection of life itself, its producers crafting a vision of better living through television by providing a view of things more worthwhile, more interesting. I am not being dismissive of the format, nor is it my intent to establish a hierarchy that privileges the "discourse of sobriety."[1] Some television critics demonize the genre only in the interest of salvaging what they consider the best programs, which they commonly understand as those having the greatest social weight.

The entire history of the form is beyond the scope of this chapter, and I open by admitting that I am turning to a few select images that have recently caught my attention and that I believe are most relevant to my analysis of transience and trauma. I consider reality television with this goal in mind, so I am less concerned with a static definition of the genre and more concerned with the expectations that are brought to the form and what cultural effects may lie in its wake. Reality television is a representational practice that suggests unmitigated access to real people and real situations and, as such, it inherently aligns itself with the perverse thrill of traumatic engagement. In its suggestion of immediacy, reality television thrives on voyeuristic uncertainty, regardless of the particular formal vocabulary at play. It seems readily apparent